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SENATE HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION

EXHIBIT NO. 8

DATE: 1-27-2011

BILL NO. SB 82

January 27, 2011

The Honorable Llew Jones, Chairman
Senate Highways and Transportation Committee
Montana State Senate
PO Box 200500
Helena, MT 59620-0500

RE: SB 82 – Provide for a Primary Seatbelt Law

Dear Chairman Jones and Members of the Senate Highways and Transportation Committee:

On behalf of RiverStone Health, Yellowstone County's public health organization, I urge your favorable consideration of SB 82 - Provide for a Primary Seatbelt Law. To achieve our public health goal of *Healthy People in Healthy Communities*, we do our work in a systematic, population-based approach that includes promoting and encouraging healthy behaviors and preventing injuries. Primary seat belt laws save lives and save money.

For people ages 5-34 years, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death and buckling a seat belt cuts in half the chance of being seriously injured or killed in a crash. Seat belt use is the single most effective way to save lives and reduce injuries in crashes.

Montana is one of the 19 states that do not have primary enforcement of seat belt laws and those 19 states account for nearly half of unbelted drivers and passengers on U.S. roadways. In 2009, if all states would have had primary seat belt laws there would have been 12,000 fewer injuries and 450 more lives would have been saved. Last year in Montana, 155 people lost their lives in car crashes; 117 of them were not wearing seat belts.

A 2008 study conducted by HarborView Medical Center found that unbelted Montana motorists accrue additional medical expenses through increased hospital admissions, increased cost per admission, and increased emergency services totaling over \$36.7 million per year. Additionally, the Medicaid cost to Montana is over \$14 million for unbelted motorists in accidents. Montana drivers are subsidizing \$51 for every unbelted motorist.

It's simple; not passing a primary seatbelt law in today's economic climate is like throwing money away. A primary seat belt law will save lives, reduce injury and will save money by reducing health care costs spent caring for unrestrained drivers and passengers.

Thank you for your favorable consideration of SB 82. I look forward to working with you on this and other important public health measures. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at barbara.sch@riverstonehealth.org or 651-6420.

Sincerely,

Barbara Schneeman, Director
Communication & Advocacy

Cc: Senators Brad Hamlett, Jon Sonju, Ron Arthun, Anders Blewett, Ed Buttrey, Mary Caferro, Jim Keane, Bruce Tutvedt, Gene Vuckovich, David Wanzenried, Ryan Zinke